



How Stalin buried Marx

Cyril Smith is very effective in dealing with the phrase “dialectical materialism”, which was never used by Marx, was invented by Kautsky and Plekhanov, and was turned into a catch-phrase by Stalin. The **attached** item is Chapter 2, “How the Marxists Buried Marx” (linked below), from Cyril Smith’s “Marx at the Millennium”, published in 1998. On the third page of that chapter, Smith wrote:

“... it is appropriate to begin with one of the most widely circulated philosophical statements of the twentieth century. It starts like this:

“Dialectical materialism is the outlook of the Marxist-Leninist party. It is called dialectical materialism because its approach to the phenomena of nature, its method of apprehending them is dialectical, while its interpretation of the phenomena of nature, its conception of these phenomena, its theory, is materialistic.

“Historical materialism is the extension of the principles

of dialectical materialism to the study of social life, an application of the principles of dialectical materialism to the phenomena of the life of society, to the study of society and of its history.”

“This stuff appeared in 1939. In my view, its method, standpoint, dogmatic style and conclusions are all utterly opposed to everything that Marx stood for.”

The author was J. V. Stalin. A little later Smith writes (and he could have been writing about “Dialego”):

*“Let us bring ourselves to look briefly at the way the Stalinist catechism of 1939 hitched up a highly mechanised materialism with something called ‘dialectics’. On the one hand, ‘Nature, being, the material world, is primary, and mind, thought, is secondary.’ What does this word ‘primary’ mean? Does it mean ‘first in time’ or ‘first in importance’? Or does it mean that matter ‘causes’ changes in ‘mind’? Nobody can tell, and precisely **this ambiguity conferred mysterious power.**”*

Smith shows how even Lenin had been fooled by the catchphrase:

“In the preface to his 1908 book Materialism and Empirio-Criticism, Lenin declared: ‘Marx and Engels scores of times termed their philosophical views dialectical materialism.’ He was so sure about this, that he felt no need to give any references.

“In fact, there is not one! Marx never employed the phrase in any of his writings. The term ‘dialectical materialism’ was introduced in 1891 by Plekhanov, in an article in Kautsky’s Neue Zeit. He thought wrongly, I believe, that he was merely adapting it from Engels’s usage in Anti-Duhring and Ludwig Feuerbach.”

Cyril Smith did a good job. His work can help those who would wish to liberate themselves from the dead hands of Plekhanov, Kautsky and Stalin.

Cyril Smith also does not spare Trotsky, with whom he otherwise appears to have had some sympathy. The most serious deficiency he finds in Trotsky, however, is not any of Trotsky’s sins of omission or dissembling, but Trotsky’s lack of philosophy, and his failure to get any of his followers to make up his own deficiency. While Lenin made great progress in philosophy, Trotsky failed altogether, writes Smith.

What Smith is saying is that in the last analysis, it was the inability to overcome the Philistine, Stalin, through full command of philosophy, which led to the degradation of the Russian Revolution and its eventual reversal. Philosophy is the keystone. Without it, the other stones are bound to fall. Smith says of the Trotskyists:

“But they never had the theoretical resources to penetrate to its philosophical core. The best they could do was to show that Stalinist policies and distortions were

contrary to the decisions of Lenin's party and the teachings of 'Marxism'."

The Trotskyists were trapped within the same hall of mirrors that they had helped Stalin to construct.

The practical work of philosophy is, crucially, to weed out or clip off the words, dead of meaning, that encumber and trip us in our work; or otherwise, if possible, to restore their freshness. Some of those words in our present time might be: "hegemony", "accumulation", and "elements of socialism".

The full Cyril Smith archive on MIA [can be found here](#).

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: How the Marxists Buried Marx, 1998, Smith, [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#).
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